My journey in engineering and advice to female engineers

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How did I start my personal journey in engineering?

I always loved maths and physics at school and found the subjects easy. I was lucky to be able go on a WISE course at Imperial College in London where I met real female engineers! They offer engineering workshops and courses for girls, to help them learn about STEM careers. I then went on to study Mechanical Engineering, at Bristol University. Mechanical engineering is one of the broadest engineering courses you can study. I have a genuine interest in the automotive industry and mechanical engineering helped me get into it. And lastly I had a belief that if the Boys can do it – so can I!

I have worked in the automotive industry for 22 years now and had various roles in Product Development at Ford Motor Company based at Dunton Technical Centre, Essex. My most challenging role was a few years ago when I was leading a team to deliver a new Stage V emissions diesel engine. The engine had to meet the legal emission requirements and we could not deliver it late. It was to be used for three different vehicles in different markets and it was being manufactured in five facilities – UK, Turkey, Thailand, South Africa and Argentina. We had a big deadline to meet, with an enormous amount of cooperation required. I was leading the team and there was a lot of travelling involved, plus, of course, we had to consider different languages and cultures. Ultimately, we had to ensure everyone produced to same standard and on time.

The role I enjoy the most is my current role as Plant Vehicle Team Engineering Manager based in Valencia Assembly Plant. Ford manufactures five different vehicles on the same line producing a total volume of 1,800 vehicles a day. My team are responsible for ensuring quality targets are met and to support the manufacturing teams to keep the production line going! The best part of this job is the variability and sometimes not knowing exactly what issues need to be fixed when you start the day – I have total vehicle responsibility and lead a large team making a difference daily to the product – fixing and improving the vehicle for our customers!

My guidance and encouragement to aspiring female engineers?
I actively try to promote to younger girls what engineering can do and can be. It comes back to the WISE course. I want to be a role model for the younger female generation, to give them an experience on what engineering can be about. There are lots of diverse engineering roles in the design and manufacture of vehicles and very few these days require you to get your hands dirty! They all give a positive feeling and sense of contribution and, if I can give that insight to young girls, that's good.

Unfortunately, I don't think the balance of gender has changed significantly over the last 20 years. The percentages of young women studying or working in engineering, is still comparatively low in UK compared to rest of Europe. This can be addressed by having more role models and positive imaging and information about what engineering careers involve, especially for parents and teachers.

In my experience, it's important to regularly review career plans to ensure goals are relevant and identify gaps to achieving them. I constantly review my five-year plan but it can change from month to month. I have goals and ways to develop my career and I spend time regularly checking that I am still on track and I am always challenging myself.

Last year I went on an executive leadership course which made me revisit my skills and strengths. Revisiting and checking is very important for men and women, however I believe women may have to do this more frequently than men because they have to deal with practical life changes. I actively mentor female engineers at Ford, to help support and encourage them to consider their goals and provide insights into how to they can develop and push themselves that bit further.

Outside of Ford, I also support the WISE Campaign and the Women's Engineering Society, which is dedicated to supporting women in the industry. They run an annual conference and local activities which is great for networking and keeping up to speed with industry knowledge, including the annual National Women’s Engineering Day NWED on 23 June, which I have championed for the last 4 years at Ford.